Care and Learning Alliance

NHS Highland

The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Smart Start







For <u>Practitioner's</u> working with and for children and young people.

The material in this pack supports practitioners working with babies, toddlers, young children and their families.

Introduction

Welcome to ***Smart Start***

This programme has been carefully developed to equip professionals working with early years children with the tools and confidence to enjoy delivering a crucial aspect of all children's learning and development. As practitioners supporting early year's development, you are in a position to make a significant positive difference to children's lives and the choices they make later on.

Healthy eating, physical activity, and the self awareness to begin making the best choices for ourselves are core components of every child's development. The Smart Start programme covers these through an engaging and relevant set of resources and ideas for possible lines of development to follow the children's interests. It also addresses many key experiences and outcomes outlined in Curriculum for Excellence.

'Child Healthy Weight' has been a major priority for the Scottish Government for several years, and will remain so for the foreseeable future. We strongly believe that 'health' is the most important aspect of this – physical, mental, social and emotional health. We use an approach based on nurturing the strengths and abilities of individuals, families and communities to make the best choices they can within the real life circumstances they face. It is an approach that is inclusive, positive, non-judgemental and person centred. It looks to create supportive environments, and draw out the skills and resources of all participants to be as healthy as they can be.

Smart Start forms an essential part of the health improvement support that we provide across the whole life course. From pre-conception; through pregnancy, breast-feeding, weaning and early years; throughout a child's journey through school and into adulthood; across the working aged population and into older age: we strive to provide consistent and cumulative opportunities for good health.

The foundations that we build in the early years and through Smart Start are built upon through our High 5 Health and Wellbeing Programme for Primary Schools, and as of 2015 we are developing more resources and programmes for Secondary Schools that will form the bridge to our adult provision.

NHS Highland, in partnership with The Highland Council and Care and Learning Alliance, thank you for your participation in this broad picture of supporting health and learning; and we hope you enjoy bringing Smart Start alive in your own centres.

Dan Jenkins, Health Promotion Specialist, NHS Highland; dan.jenkins@nhs.net

Key Messages

Everyone can make healthy lifestyle choices which will have a positive impact on their health.

Lifestyle choices we make in our childhood can shape the rest of our lives.

Encourage parental involvement as much as possible. This could be through specific workshops for parents, or activities sent home to try.

Avoid referring to high fat, high sugar foods as rewards, or treats for special occasions. It is not helpful for children to place extra value on these foods. Non-food rewards, like a magazine, stickers or a cuddle should be encouraged instead. Treats are things that are only had occasionally, for reasons of affordability, seasonality or other restriction, and so things like strawberries or pineapple can be considered as treats rather than automatically following cultural habits of e.g. chocolate cake.

Encourage understanding of different food needs. These differences may be for social, cultural or medical reasons. Looking at different food cultures could increase awareness of new foods that we should eat more of, without bringing nutrition into the lesson at all.

Avoid labelling foods as “good” or “bad” foods. Instead, distinguish between foods that our body needs more of (so we try to eat more of these), and foods our body does not need (so we try to eat less of these)

Remain non-judgemental to people’s current food habits. Some foods we should eat less of like pizzas, burgers, sweets, crisps and sugary drinks may be a regular part of a family’s food culture and very difficult to change completely. Work with it not against it, and teach children how to appreciate variety; and (where contact is part of a programme) support families to try alternatives or make the healthiest versions of the food they like.

Smart Start is designed to show how food can have a positive influence on your health and wellbeing, rather than be a threat to it; and that physical activity and movement is primarily about having **FUN**, rather than following an exercise regime.

Be sensitive to different family budgets. Many families find fruit expensive, and high fat processed meats are often cheaper sandwich fillings than lean meat or fish. Many formal physically active opportunities cost money, so focus on creative fun through movement at home or the local environment.

Smart Start 1: Look at Me

Children need to recognise that everyone is unique because it helps them appreciate differences in abilities, cultures, and perspectives. Understanding this builds empathy, respect, and kindness, while also helping them feel confident in their own individuality.

By valuing uniqueness, children learn the importance of inclusion and cooperation, which are key to forming healthy relationships and positive communities.

The purpose of this section is to:
Help the child notice what makes them unique, recognise emotions and develop confidence, self-awareness and respect for differences.

One-to-one play and learning experiences

- **My baby photo** — With permission, look together at a baby photo of the child. Notice how they have grown and ask what they recognise; compare with a current photo rather than with other children.
- **Mirror portrait** — Offer a child-safe mirror and washable drawing materials. Invite the child to draw or paint their reflection and talk about their hair, eyes, expressions or favourite features
- **My body outline** — On large paper, draw around the child if they wish. Invite them to add body parts and explore where the heart, lungs and stomach might be using pictures or books
- **Feelings faces** — Use a mirror, puppets or picture cards to explore happy, worried, excited or sad expressions. Ask what helps the child feel comfortable and listen without correcting their feelings.
- **Move a feeling** — Invite the child to show a happy dance, a slow tired walk or an energetic excited movement; copy their ideas and describe what you notice.
- **Story and strengths** — Read ***Giraffes Can't Dance*** or ***Happy Hippo***, ***Angry Duck*** together. Talk about trying new things, changing feelings and something the child enjoys or feels proud of.

Working in partnership with parents and carers

- Discuss ways the family already helps the child name emotions and feel secure; offer to model a simple feelings conversation.

Smart Start 2: Keep our Heart Healthy

It is important to help young children understand how their bodies work so they can learn to care for themselves. This awareness encourages them to make healthy choices that support their growth, energy, and overall wellbeing.

The purpose of this section is to:

- Raise children's awareness of how their bodies work and how to look after their bodies and make Healthy Choices

One-to-one play and learning experiences

- **Feel the beat** — Help the child notice their heartbeat by resting a hand on their chest or feeling their pulse, if comfortable. Try a short walk, dance or spot jog and notice any change.

- **Heart pump** — Use the pack's simple squeeze-ball water demonstration prepared by the adult. Let the child observe or squeeze a safe model, explaining that the heart pumps blood around the body.

- **Heartbeat sounds** — Listen to a recording of a heartbeat. Invite the child to copy its rhythm using claps, a drum or tapping hands on knees.

- **Teddy check-up** — Offer a toy stethoscope, teddy and body pictures. Follow the child's pretend play while talking about how bodies work.

- **Choose a movement** — Let the child choose jumping, dancing, stretching, balancing or moving like an animal. Ask what feels different before and after.

- **Heart collage** — Provide a paper heart and food pictures. Explore variety, energy and looking after our bodies without labelling individual foods as bad.

Working in partnership with parents and carers

- Ask what kinds of active play the child enjoys at home and build on those interests.
- Demonstrate a two-minute movement game that works in the family's space, indoors or outside.
- Share a simple idea such as noticing how breathing or heartbeat changes after a walk; invite parents to tell you what the child noticed.

Click on the icon to access BBC Bitesize -
What does the heart do?

Smart Start 3: Physical Fun: Moving in ways I enjoy

The purpose of this section is to:

- Support confidence, coordination, balance and enjoyment of everyday physical play. This theme appears in the original pack's getting-started ideas and physical activity cards.

One-to-one play and learning experiences

- **Mini obstacle trail** — With the child, create a short route using cushions, tape lines, cardboard or safe outdoor features. Let them choose how to travel through it.
- **Follow my movement** — Copy the child's invented stretches, dance steps or animal movements, then invite them to copy one of yours if they want.
- **Ball play** — Roll, gently throw, kick or catch a suitable ball together, adapting distance and size to the child's abilities.
- **Activity card choice** — Show two or three original physical activity cards. Let the child choose one and try it with you; talk about how it felt afterwards
- **Outdoor discovery** — During a short walk, explore stepping over lines, balancing on safe edges, reaching high or moving between landmarks.

Working in partnership with parents and carers

- Explore movement opportunities already available during daily routines, such as walking to the shop, dancing while tidying or visiting a local green space.
- Offer one low-cost movement idea matched to the family's home and the child's preferences.
- Ask parents what movement the child enjoys and what, if anything, makes active play difficult; problem-solve together.

Smart Start 4: Where Food Comes From

It is important for children to understand where food comes from because it helps them appreciate the journey from farm to plate and the effort involved in producing it. This knowledge supports a healthier relationship with food, encouraging respect, mindful eating, and better choices for their wellbeing.

The purpose of this section is to:

- Support children in developing an awareness that food comes from either animals or plants
- Support and encourage children to make informed healthy choices about the food they eat.
- To identify opportunities for parents to be involved in activities to promote

One-to-one play and learning experiences

- **Food detective** — Choose one familiar food or package and trace its journey backwards: shop, farm or garden, then plant or animal. Use photos or a picture book.
- **Cook something simple** — Let the child choose between two suitable recipes, explore ingredients, help make a short shopping list and take part in safe preparation.
- **Pretend shop or café** — Set up a small shop with empty clean packaging and toy food. Follow the child's role play, discussing names, origins and favourite foods.
- **Grow and notice** — Plant cress or a bean in a clear container and observe changes together across visits. Let the child water it and record growth through drawings or photos
- **Food matching** — Match food photographs to pictures of plants or animals. Accept "the shop" as a useful starting answer and gently explore what happened before
- **Local food walk** — If appropriate and agreed, notice foods in a shop, market or garden during an individual outing, with normal safeguarding and risk assessment.

Working in partnership with parents and carers

- Ask about foods the family enjoys and where they think those foods come from; include culturally familiar examples.
- Offer a windowsill growing idea using an inexpensive container, or suggest noticing plants and foods during everyday shopping.
- If the family wishes, plan a simple recipe together and agree which preparation tasks the child can safely help with.

Click on the icon below for further FOOD materials for Early Years

Smart Start 5: Fruit and Vegetables

Allowing children to explore fruit and vegetables using their senses—such as touching, smelling, seeing, and tasting—helps them build a positive and familiar relationship with these foods. When children feel comfortable and curious rather than pressured, they are more likely to develop an interest in a wider variety of fruits and vegetables. This sensory exploration encourages them to try new options and accept different textures, flavours, and ways of preparation, supporting a more varied and balanced diet over time.

The purpose of this section is to:

- To help children feel more comfortable and confident around fruit and vegetables
- Encourage curiosity and willingness to explore new foods

One-to-one play and learning experiences

- Mystery produce bag — Place a familiar fruit or vegetable in a bag. Invite the child to feel or smell it, describe it and then reveal it; avoid blindfolds unless the child independently prefers them.
- Fruit and vegetable faces — Offer pictures or prepared safe pieces to arrange on a paper plate into a face, animal or pattern.
- Vegetable characters — Use a large potato or carrot and age-appropriate craft materials to invent a character, with adult management of sharp or small items.
- Print and paint — Try potato printing or mark-making with cut vegetables prepared by the adult
- Snack preparation — Invite the child to wash, peel with assistance or arrange appropriately prepared fruit or vegetables. They may explore without tasting.
- Story in the soil — Read The Enormous Turnip and act it out with toys and a tray of sand or soil, according to the child's interests.
- Grow a seed — Place a bean beside damp kitchen roll in a jar and revisit to look for roots and shoots.

Working in partnership with parents and carers

- Ask which fruit or vegetables the child already sees or enjoys at home; celebrate familiarity without judging choices.
- Discuss affordable, seasonal or frozen options where useful, and encourage parents to let children explore foods at their own pace.

Click on the icon below to access **HENRY:** a highly useful resource for supporting work with families. It is an evidence-based, non-judgemental approach that works in partnership with families to create lasting, healthy changes. By building on parents' strengths and encouraging them to set their own goals, it empowers families to develop healthier lifestyles in a supportive and understanding way.

Smart Start 6: Eat Well

Involving children in understanding and preparing meals and snacks helps them develop positive attitudes towards food and healthy eating. It builds confidence, encourages independence, and increases their willingness to try new foods. Sharing these experiences as a family also creates valuable opportunities to spend time together, and research shows that eating meals together can strengthen family relationships, improve communication, and support children's emotional wellbeing.
Overall, this hands-on involvement helps to establish lifelong healthy habits and more positive food choices.

The purpose of this section is to:

- To help children make the connection between food and health
- Support children to develop an awareness of the effect different foods have on their growth and development and help them to make healthy choices.
- To identify snack foods into two simple groups – foods we should eat more of and foods we shouldn't eat too often.

One-to-one play and learning experiences

- **My shopping basket** — Offer a few toy foods or food pictures and a basket. Invite the child to choose foods for a pretend meal and explain their ideas.
- **Food sorting** — Explore foods we might eat often and foods we might have less often, without moral labels or rigid rules. Use the child's familiar foods.
- **Make a snack plan** — Ask the child to choose between a few available snack options, using pictures, drawing or words to make a simple plan.
- **Personal placemat** — Decorate a placemat with favourite foods, drawings and foods the child is curious about.
- **Taste, smell, look** — Offer small, safely prepared samples where appropriate. Talk about texture, smell, colour and preference. Looking or touching counts as participation; tasting is optional.
- **Lunchbox play** — Pack a pretend lunchbox together, considering variety and what the child likes and can manage.
- **Feed the teddy** — Use a puppet to explore different meals and snacks through imaginative play.
- **Food picture matching** — Adapt the original Food Bingo cards into a one-to-one matching, naming or memory game rather than a competition.
- **Food story —** Read The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Oliver's Vegetables or another food-themed book and follow the child's questions.

Working in partnership with parents and carers

- Ask parents about family mealtimes and what they would like to support, such as confidence with new foods or helping with preparation.
- Offer a picture-based shopping or snack idea for home, tailored to food availability, budget, dietary needs and family routines.

Further Resources

Resources to use with children

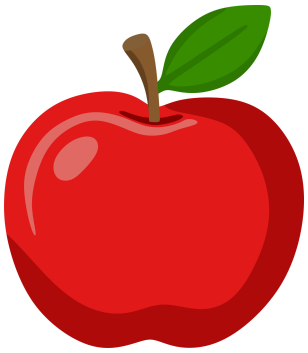
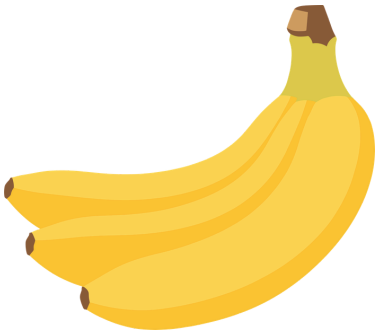
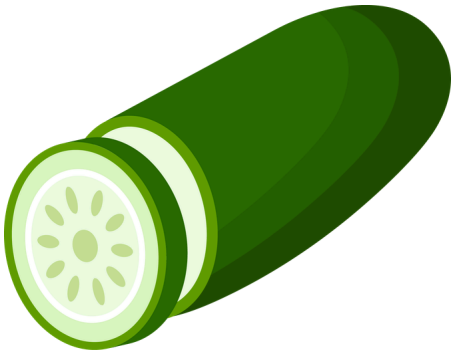
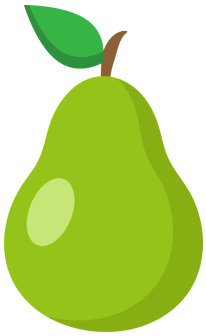
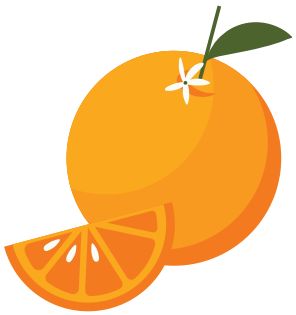
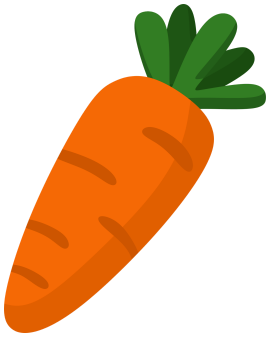
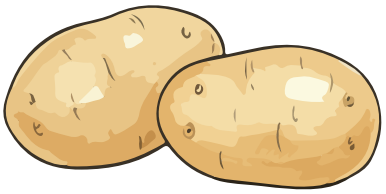
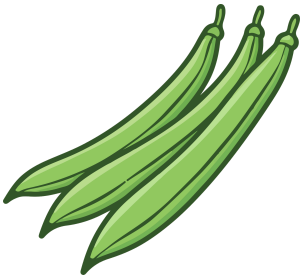
The 'Five a Day' song - eating fruit and vegetables	https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p011lbd4
Where does food come from	https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z6pms82
Getting Ready to Cook	https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zjpmfdm/articles/zb2dxg8
Set of short clips on growing, keeping clean and eating well	https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zbdcy9q
COSMIC Yoga for children	https://www.youtube.com/@CosmicKidsYoga

Resources to use with parents

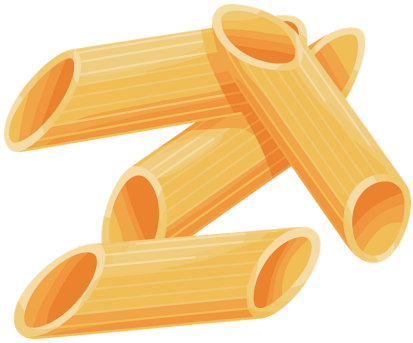
Having fun outdoors with your toddler ParentClub	https://www.parentclub.scot/articles/having-fun-outdoors-your-toddler
Keeping active indoors ParentClub	https://www.parentclub.scot/articles/keeping-active-indoors
Ball games to play with your toddler ParentClub	https://www.parentclub.scot/articles/ball-games-play-your-toddler
X Programme	https://www.thexprogramme.scot.nhs.uk/
Recipies from X Programme	https://www.thexprogramme.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Recipe-File.pdf

Resources to support pack ideas

Food Bingo - cards for cutting



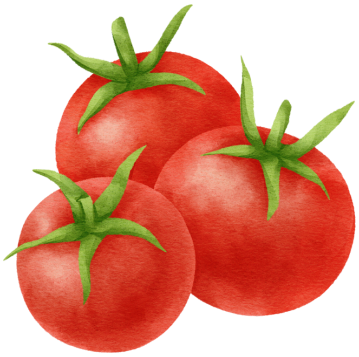










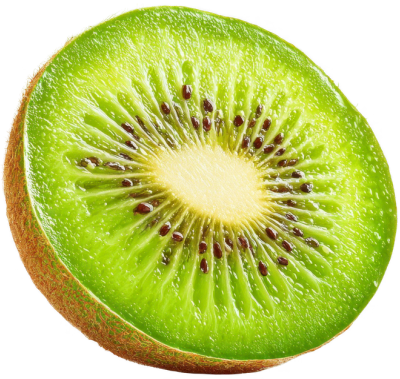










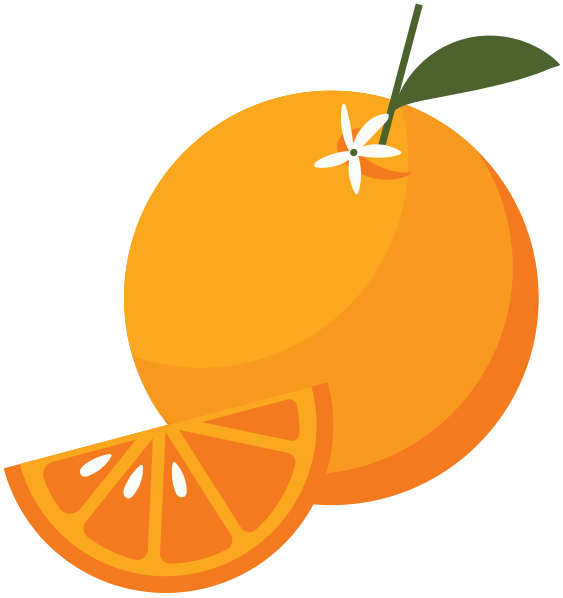
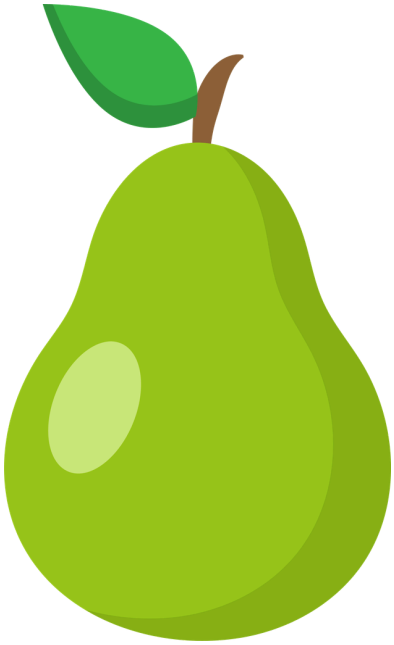
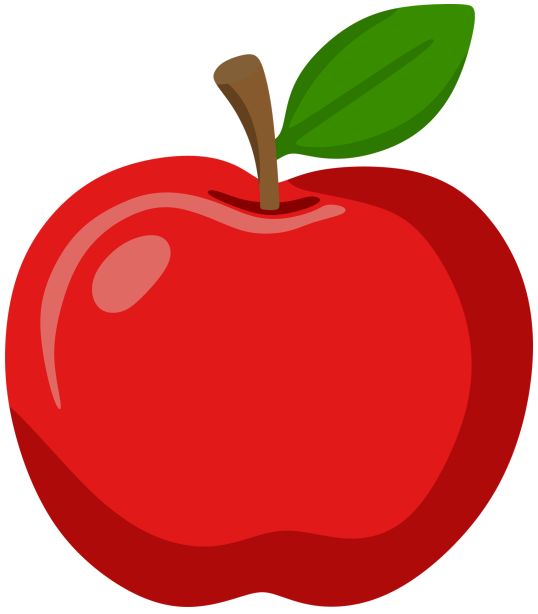




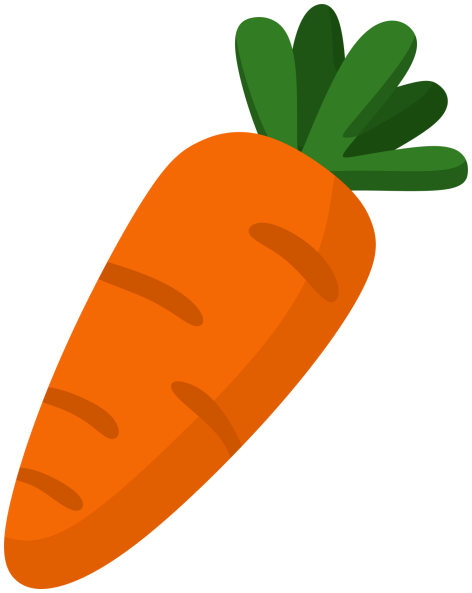
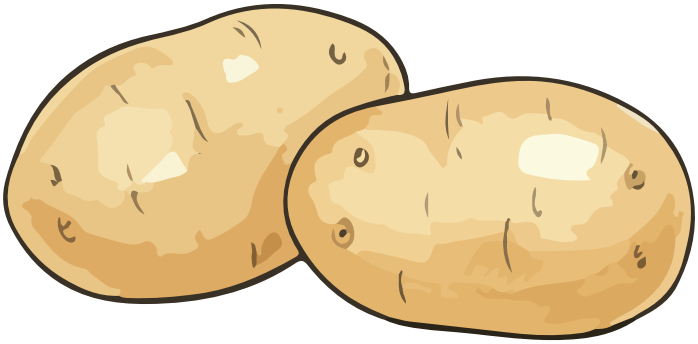




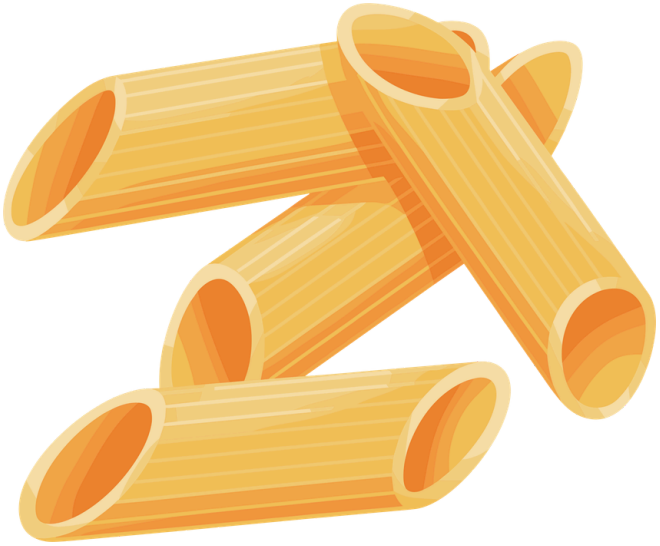
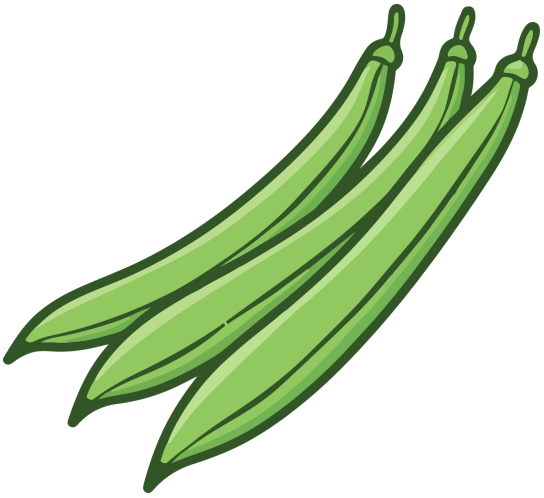
Food Bingo Cards

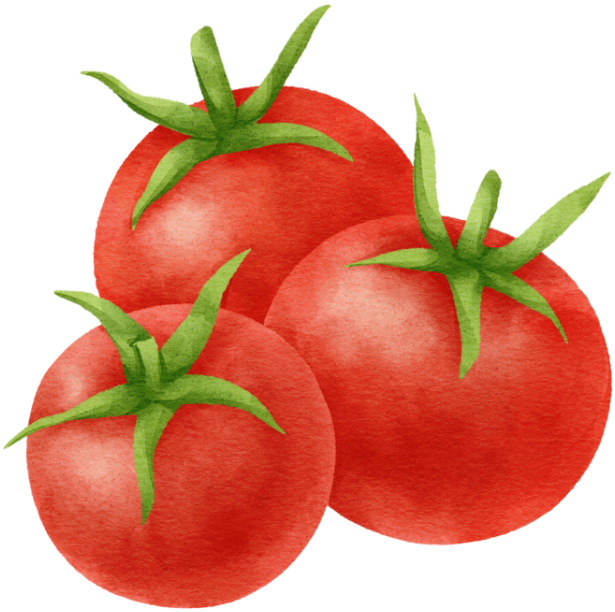
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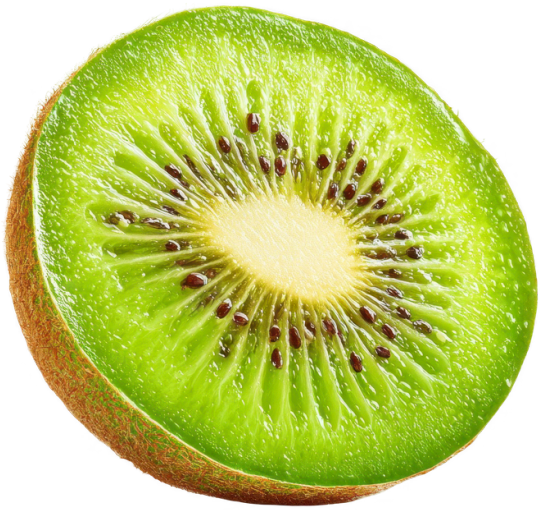
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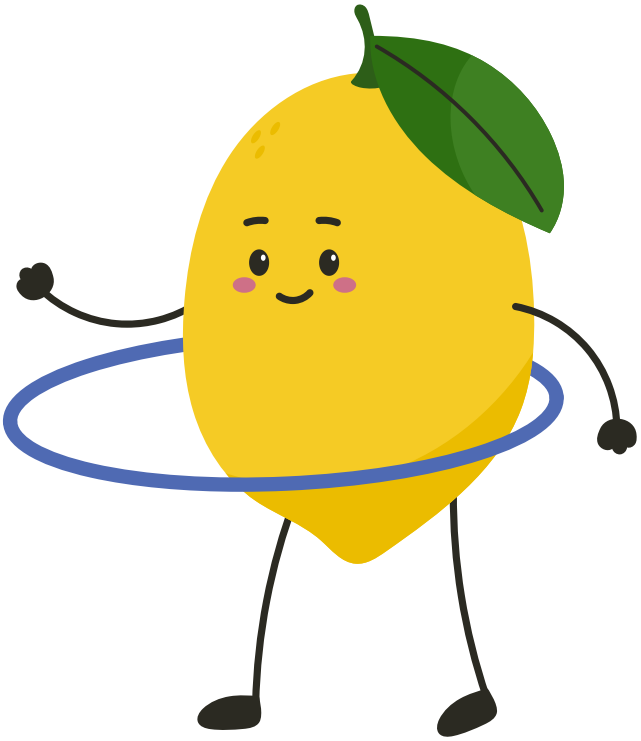
	
	

Food Bingo Cards

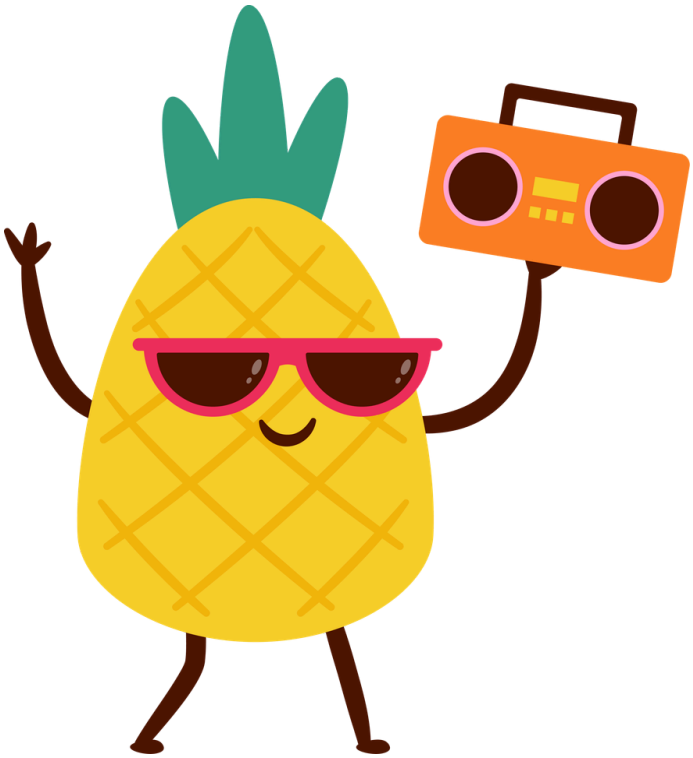
Physical Activity Cards

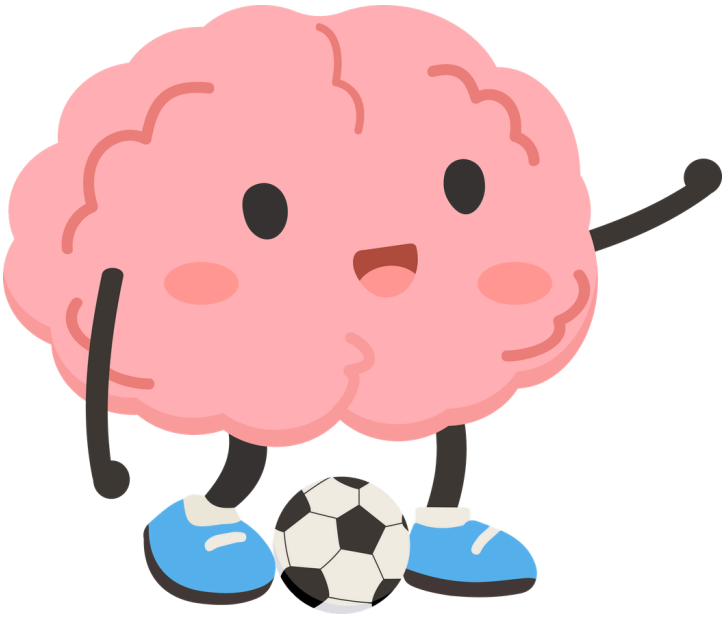
Cut out the cards below • Spread on table and ask children to choose which activity card they want to do today? • Children can use the glue stick to glue their card into their special book/picture or template that follows this page – don't forget to ask them about the experience after they have done it and record their comments.

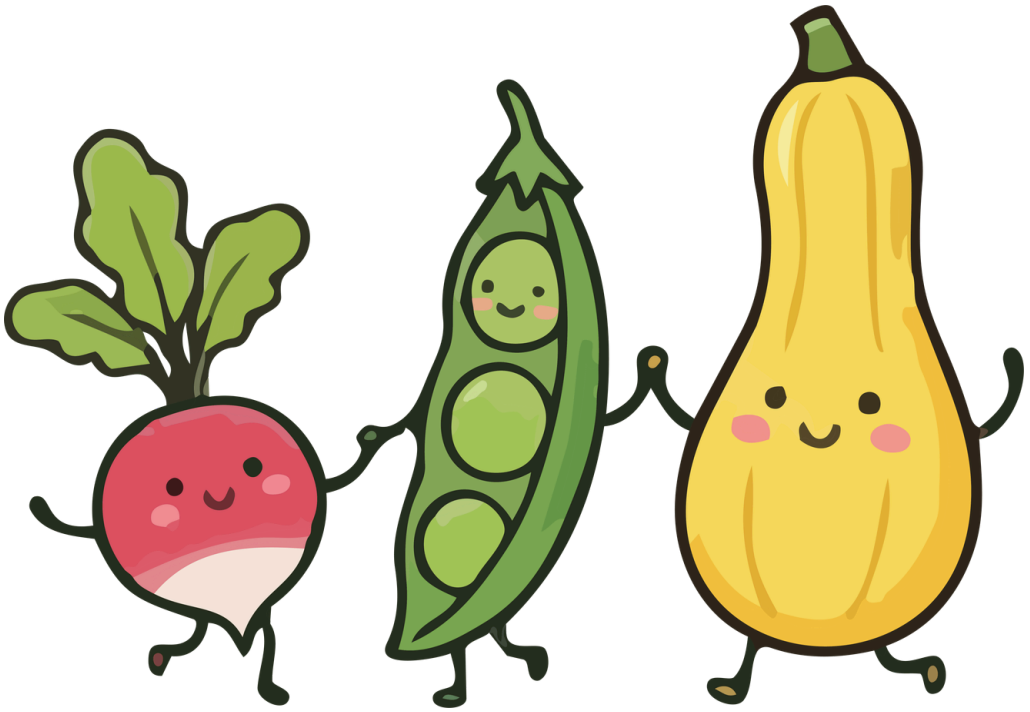














My Physical Exercise

With my friends, I am learning how important our hearts are and how they work.

Draw a picture of your favourite physical activity:

Further support for professionals

Setting the Table	https://www.thexprogramme.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Recipe-File.pdf
Toddler and Young Children: food, mood and health guidance 2023	https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/media/bizaucia/toddler-guidance-food-mood-and-health-final-version-may-2023.pdf
Food Matters	https://hub.careinspectorate.com/how-we-support-improvement/quality-improvement-programmes-and-topics/food-matters/
Keeping children safe: supporting positive mealtime experiences in early learning and childcare (ELC)	https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/5018/elc-practice-note-4-mealtimes.pdf



Thank you for using the Smart Start programme—we hope you have found it useful. We value your feedback and would love to hear how you have used the programme to support children's learning. Please take two minutes to complete our short survey by clicking the link below.



https://form.jotform.com/261022559759060